

Swinging general slipped past security screeners

[Tom Vanden Brook](#), USA TODAY 11:16 a.m. EDT August 29, 2016



© Capt. John Landry, U.S. Army U.S. Army Brig. Gen. David Haight of the 10th Mountain Division (Light Infantry) and U.S. Army Maj. Darren Glenn of the 2nd Battalion, 87th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division...

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon’s failure to detect the extramarital affair and “swinger lifestyle” of a top general despite background checks that likely included polygraph tests exposes flaws in vetting those entrusted with the nation’s most sensitive national security secrets, according to experts and a top senator.

The Army fired Maj. Gen. David Haight from his job overseeing operations at European Command earlier this year after investigators uncovered his double life. Haight’s post required him to have access to the military’s classified capabilities to thwart Russian aggression, and his double life would have put him at risk of being blackmailed, several senior officials have said.

But Haight's dark secret came to light only after the military received anonymous tips about his 11-year extramarital affair and other sexual escapades and began investigating in December. Officials entrusted with the most sensitive information undergo background checks and lie-detector tests every five years, meaning Haight passed at least two while he was having an affair.

His case shows that a determined and capable liar can evade detection, experts say.

"It's disappointing to see senior officers behave this way, and that the system is unable to identify people with integrity problems," said Derek Reveron, professor of national security affairs at the Naval War College. "Adultery clearly illustrates someone who displays bad judgment and is untrustworthy — red flags in background investigations."

But Reveron added: "Unless someone who is interviewed raises an issue, then there's no way to know if people have second lives."

The Haight case shows that more needs to be done to detect potential threats to national security secrets, said Sen. Claire McCaskill, D-Mo. She has advocated for more stringent background checks following the massive leak of security secrets by former National Security Agency contractor Edward Snowden and the attack by a contractor with a security clearance that killed 12 people at the Navy Yard here in 2013.

"As we've seen, these background investigations aren't foolproof, especially if the subjects aren't truthful," McCaskill said. "I've worked to improve the process — ensuring better oversight and mandating automated review — and while we've made progress, more work needs to be done to vet those individuals trusted with nation's classified information. Too many cases in recent years have shown gaping holes in the process."

Haight would have been subject to some of the most careful screening the government conducts, said Scott "Dutch" Murray, a retired Air Force colonel. Murray, a career intelligence officer, served combat tours in Iraq and Afghanistan and helped plot targets against the Islamic State. Murray underwent multiple checks at five-year intervals and described the process.

A lengthy questionnaire known as Standard Form 86 seeks detail about the applicant's family, friends and finances. Lying on the form is a felony. Screeners also interview friends and neighbors.

As the director of operations for European Command, Haight would also have required higher clearances including for Special Technical Operations,

"That's where you have to take lie-detector tests," Murray said. "They're trying to find out your vulnerability to blackmail or extortion."

One question Murray was asked: Have you lied to your wife?

Haight evidently passed his lie-detector tests. Perhaps that's not a surprise. A National Academy of Sciences report in 2003 questioned the value of the counter-intelligence polygraph test. The academy concluded that the polygraph flagged too many innocent people and failed to find enough spies.

Haight would have been privy to the most advanced U.S. capabilities to counter Russian aggression, allied troop movements and likely the war effort against the Islamic State since Turkey is in EUCOM's sphere, Murray said.

The Army's inspector general, acting on a referral from an anonymous tipster, found that Haight had an inappropriate sexual relationship and had misused his government email and cell phone. The report on Haight used the definition of swinging as, "Being promiscuous, typically engaging in group sex or swapping sexual partners."

Emails obtained by USA TODAY showed Haight and his girlfriend setting up assignations with other women and couples, and explicit references to oral and anal sex.

The Army fired him from his job in Europe and pulled him back to Washington where a board will determine the rank at which he retires. Busting him down several ranks would cost him tens of thousands per year in pension.

Meanwhile, Haight's security clearance has been suspended while investigators review his case, according to Col. Patrick Seiber, an Army spokesman. It could be reinstated or revoked, in which case Haight could appeal.

The Army is committed to "aggressively" investigating allegations of misconduct against soldiers, including generals, Seiber said.

Recent changes in the screening process allowing investigators to examine social media and behavior show promise, said Reveron, the war college professor and a reserve officer in the Navy.

Fortunately, blackmail and espionage through sex against the United States is extremely rare, Reveron said.

"We talk about foreign intelligence services using the 'honey pot' technique to target people for recruitment and then blackmail," Reveron said. "I don't know of any specific cases where honey pots worked."

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